

From MOVE to Hardline: A Punk Perspective on the History of Total Liberation

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Abstract: Total liberation has garnered interest recently among activists and scholars, yet no studies of its origins or immediate background seem to exist. Scholars such as David Pellow, Steven Best, and Anthony Nocella frame total liberation as a merger of Earth liberation, animal liberation, and human liberation. Yet what do we know about the rise of total liberation and the Total Liberation gatherings that took place in the United States from 1999 to 2004? This article applies a punk perspective while examining two precursors to total liberation: the MOVE Organization (founded in the early 1970s) and Hardline (founded in the early 1990s). Both groups advocated a sort of revolutionary oneness with nature, “eternal” primitivism, and defence of all life. Yet, both groups also opposed abortion and homosexuality. Tracing these groups’ relationships to anarcho-punk, vegan straight edge scenes, and the two most documented Total Liberation gatherings, we witness both the rise of contemporary senses of “total liberation,” a clash between approaches, and a transition from “prophet-based” sects to coalition-oriented activism.

Keywords: hardcore, anarchism, deep ecology, animal liberation, sects, MOVE Organization, Hardline, Earth liberation

1 Introduction

People who write histories ... ultimately tend to shape them into manageable narratives and in doing so they pervert or distort the reality.

—Ian MacKaye (quoted in Kuhn 2009, 22)

This is my story, my life's composition, the struggle I survived gave me true definition.

The truth behind the lies, liberating God's glory, if y'all can't relate, that's okay, this is my story.

—Naj One, “My Story,” 2005

This article tells one of many possible stories about *total liberation* (often described as Earth, animal, and human liberation united) and two groups, MOVE and Hardline, who presaged this concept. With connections to anarcho-punk¹ and vegan straight edge² punk scenes, these two groups also helped lay the foundation for the Total Liberation gatherings of the early 2000s which, in turn, led to total liberation's entry into academia in the late 2000s and early 2010s. While the phrase “total liberation” goes back as far as Mikhail Bakunin or earlier, it did not function as a rallying cry for Earth and animal liberation activists prior to the 1990s. A diversity of meanings gradually coalesced into its current usage, largely influenced by the work of anarchist academic and animal advocacy activist Steven Best who first applied the term “total liberation” after he spoke at the Total Liberation Fest in January 2004. Former Hardliner Ian

Hamilton organized the event and Ramona Africa of MOVE participated. Members of militant vegan straight edge band Gather decided to form after attending that event and performed on the Total Liberation Tour that summer.

This article uses media (typically zines and records) gathered from Internet searches, zine libraries, and personal collections combined with a few personal correspondences and interviews with relevant actors. These sources, drawn predominantly from the perspective of punk and hardcore scenes, show various connections and relationships between MOVE, total liberation, Hardline, and punk that we might otherwise miss had we not, for purposes of illustration, placed punk at the center of total liberation's background. Rather than attempt to state a clear historical line of causality, this article aims to simply show that *some* connections existed and we leave it to the reader or future research to determine their significance. This article merely provides a chronological background regarding what certain people or groups did in relation to total liberation's background. This article cannot and does not show that MOVE led to Hardline which led to total liberation. Instead, it shows that all three interacted, the order in which those interactions happened, and the anarchist/punk context that seemed to play a key role in facilitating those interactions.

The images in this article offer some visual background to different conceptions of total liberation such as Gather's use of the ecology symbol on their 2004 *Total Liberation 7"* and Hardline's crossed gun symbol. While Hardline (and MOVE) opposed abortion and homosexuality, the nascent Total Liberation scene (including Gather) advocated both pro-choice and queer liberation, rejecting Hardline (but accepting MOVE who, unlike Hardliners, kept quiet about those topics).³ Also, both MOVE and Hardline had key central personas who coordinated group philosophy and activity and both groups had sectarian orientations which, in this case,

refers to groups that (1) believe they alone have access to the whole Truth and (2) exist in tension with the surrounding society (McGuire 1997, 148–69).⁴

a. The MOVE Organization

Usually shortened to just “MOVE”—not an acronym but signifying movement, activity, life—the MOVE Organization started around 1972 in Philadelphia when John Africa and others founded the first antiracist revolutionary group in the United States to simultaneously advocate animal liberation, Earth liberation, sobriety, and something akin to anarcho-primitivism. MOVE advocated “total revolution” (Evans 2020, 46). For John Africa, “revolution” meant to “revolve,” to turn, activate, *move*—radically but peacefully—in a manner that would ultimately dismantle all guns, governments, hierarchy, prisons, and industry (James 2013, 87). The source of problems lay in human belief in categorization (for example, viewing “humans” as separate from “animals” or “trees”). John Africa’s cure lay in rejecting divisive beliefs, preaching the unity of existence, and defending *all* life. Confrontation with police in 1978 and 1985, however, left most MOVE members either killed or incarcerated. Upon release from prison in 1992, former law student and MOVE spokesperson Ramona Africa spearheaded MOVE’s resurgence on a wave of growing global support for the death row case of MOVE supporter Mumia Abu-Jamal.

Previous research on MOVE largely addressed MOVE’s relation to police/courts (e.g., Assefa and Wahrhaftig 1988/1990), media/discourse (e.g., Ekeogu 2014; Sanders and Jeffries 2013), anti-civilization/utopia (e.g., Moise 2021; Shipley and Taylor 2019), and “religion” (Fiscella 2016; Evans 2020; Floyd-Thomas 2002).

b. Hardline

Initially, a young Californian—then known only as “Sean”—founded Hardline as a hardcore punk record label in 1989. In time, Hardline shared premises nearly identical to MOVE: a revolutionary harkening to a pre-civilization ideal, sober living, antiracism, animal liberation, as well as rejection of both abortion and homosexuality.⁵ Hardline made those last two points central features of its ideology, second only to veganism/animal liberation. Hardline bands such as Raid helped turn the ideology into a local, national, and, ultimately, international scene. Sean left Hardline by 1993 yet returned in 1998 to first centralize and then dismantle Hardline around 1999. Then, he and ex-Hardliner Micah Collins (aka ‘Isa Adam Naziri) founded two consecutive Shi’a Muslim-oriented groups based on Hardline-like principles. Ahl-i Allah (People of God) and later Taliyah al-Mahdi (Vanguard of the Messiah) provided mostly an Internet forum for propaganda and online recruiting roughly between 1999–2006. Although ex-Hardliners have, since its demise, claimed MOVE as an early influence, it seems that Hardliners first mentioned MOVE publicly years after Hardline’s founding (Eeyore 2022a, 162).

No major scholarly work on Hardline exists. Only one scholar, Brian Hughes, has published a full article on Hardline where he applied William Reich’s sexual “biopathic” theory of fascism to Hardline’s “homoerotic social rituals” (Hughes 2018, 77). After Hughes, William Tsitsos devoted perhaps the most attention to Hardline in an analysis of “the politics of straight edge” where he described Hardline’s “fixation on individual morality as the root of larger problems” as a “quintessential product of the neoliberal United States, a society that [Hardline] did not hesitate to criticize” (Tsitsos 2013, 206). A number of researchers have, however, mentioned or briefly discussed Hardline, especially in collections of hardcore punk interviews

(e.g., Peterson 2009; Rettman 2017), in relation to hardcore and Earth/animal liberation (e.g., O'Hara 1999; Pike 2017; Pieslak 2014), straight edge (e.g., Foster 2001; Haenfler 2006; Kuhn 2019; Wood 2006), and/or punk and “religion” (e.g., Abraham and Stewart 2014; Stewart 2017). To these, one can add recent a non-academic text that provided both a large resource base of Hardline-related material including original images, extensive quotes from primary documents, a timeline, a broad overview of academic literature on the topic, and some discussion regarding Hardline's claimed and documented relationship to MOVE (Eeyore 2022a).

Finally, one can note some confusion in regard to definitions of “hardline.” Some scholars, punk musicians, and activists have used the term to mean something like “militant straight edge” (e.g., Foster 2001; Torkelson 2010; Wood 2006). Elgin James attributed this type of hardline to Al Barile of SSD in the early 1980s: “DC invented straight edge, Al invented hardline” (James 2004). Sean, however, denied that Hardline had roots in straight edge: “Hardline as a concept or ideology ... had almost nothing to do with straight edge.” He insisted that association came later and instead cited his personal influences such as “Liberation Theology, NOI [Nation of Islam], AIM [American Indian Movement], Anarchism, Rastafarianism [Rastafari], Move [MOVE], Oi!, Punk Rock and so on” (Rettman 2019).

c. Total Liberation

Simultaneous concern for multiple and interwoven socio-ecological issues has existed within various contexts throughout history. For the purposes of this article, we can note that a particular variant of radical holistic concerns arose within anarcho-punk circles since at least the late 1970s (Dines and Worley 2016). Throughout the early to mid-1980s, anarcho-punk bands such as Crass, Chumbawamba, Poison Girls, Icons of Filth, Omega Tribe, Conflict, and Flux of Pink

Indians (all from the UK), MDC and A.P.P.L.E. (US), and Mob 47 and Crude SS (Sweden) addressed animal advocacy, anarchism, anti-militarism, anticapitalism, and defence of the Earth. Chris Low of Oi Polloi and The Apostles recently stated that “what really introduced anarchism to punk and laid the ideological foundations for the anarcho-punk movement was *Pigs For Slaughter* fanzine” which ran from 1981–1982 (Mittens XVX 2021). No band or zine in the 1980s, however, seems to have used the term “total liberation.”

Steven Best, who popularized the term, wrote in his influential book *The Politics of Total Liberation*: “Human, animal, and earth liberation movements are different components of one inseparable struggle—against hierarchy, domination, and unsustainable social forms—none of which is possible without the others” (2014, xii). Such a struggle “will incorporate radical green, feminist, LGBT, and indigenous struggles” (ibid., 105). The same year, David Pellow published *Total Liberation*, noting: “The total liberation frame is composed of an ethic of justice and anti-oppression for people, nonhuman animals, and ecosystems; anarchism; anticapitalism; and an embrace of direct action tactics” (2014, 61). Since 2014, additional literature on total liberation references one or both of those works. Pellow himself built on previous work by Best and Best’s close collaborator Anthony Nocella, II.

Although no scholar seems to have yet documented the specific background that led up to the Total Liberation scene which, in turn, birthed total liberation, Sarat Colling, Sean Parson, and Alessandro Arrigoni expanded on Best’s work and provided a general socio-ideological background to total liberation that cited a host of influential groups and persons. These included anarchist geographer Élisée Reclus, Malcolm X, ecofeminism, Quakers, Food Not Bombs, Fred Hampton’s Rainbow Coalition, Angela Davis, American Indian Movement (AIM), the Zapatistas, A. Breeze Harper, Rod Coronado, Ashanti Alston, and the Canadian group Direct

Action which included anarcho-punks among its members and “attacked targets such as a hydrostation under construction, Litton missile factory, and porn stores” in the early 1980s (Colling, Parson, and Arrigoni 2014, 64). They wrote that the “use of ‘total liberation’ to describe a political movement was first articulated by Frantz Fanon, a socialist and early anticolonial thinker” and noted that “John Africa connected resistance to capitalism, white supremacy, environmentalism, and animal rights” (ibid., 56, 60). Responding to the whiteness of total liberation’s primary advocates, Pellow similarly expanded total liberation to bridge toward the Environmental Justice movement (“largely composed of people from communities of color, Indigenous communities, and the working class”) (Pellow 2014, 255). In that spirit, this article continues such “expansive” work to include contributions by people of color.

Although Best did not mention MOVE in his book, others did. Pellow (2014, 40), Colling et al. (2014, 60–61), Garland (2006, 60), and Anonymous (2019, 23) have all written about MOVE’s status as forerunners to and/or influences on early Earth/animal/total liberation. None of them, however, clearly demonstrated MOVE’s contribution as an early pioneer of total liberation (such as citing MOVE’s demonstrations against circuses and pet stores in the early 1970s or their participation in early Total Liberation gatherings). Some scholars have lamented that others have relegated MOVE to the margins (Floyd-Thomas 2002, 13; Taylor and Shipley 2017, 184; Wall 2002, 503). This article aims to partially remedy such oversights.

No total liberation scholar seems to have written about Hardline. One punk studies scholar, however, mentioned Hardline in a conference paper focused on straight edge lyrics on total liberation (Christoforidou 2020). Work by Boisseau and Donaghey (2015) and Stewart (2016)—both writing largely about anarcho-punk and animal advocacy—and Pellow (2014) all relate directly or indirectly to research on punk and total liberation’s current emphasis on animal

liberation. This article ties together many loose threads to weave a story of total liberation's background from a punk perspective and show that MOVE, Hardline, anarcho-punk, and vegan straight edge all interwove together two decades ago to produce the fabric for the initial Total Liberation gatherings.

2 On MOVE and Movements

a. MOVE: Introduction and Philosophy

John Africa (born Vincent Leaphart) presented MOVE as a unique organization with a uniform belief system. He never cited any influences or predecessors. Members of this predominantly Black but multiethnic organization adopted the last name "Africa," typically wore dreadlocks, lived communally, strove toward a raw food diet, revered God as "Momma" (also "Moma," "Mama," or "Mom"), and declared "Life" as their belief: "Life is the priority ... all living beings, things that move, are equally important, whether they are human beings, dogs, birds, fish, trees, ants, weeds, rivers, wind or rain" (*25 Years on the MOVE* 1997, 68). They sounded much like anarchists: "We believe in natural law, the government of self. Man-made laws are not really laws, because they don't apply equally to everyone and they contain exceptions and loopholes" (1997, 68). However, John Africa saw abortion and homosexuality as unnatural. Still, MOVE never published an entire article on either topic and kept it mostly private to the group. They also openly collaborated with gays, lesbians, and trans people for decades.

Primarily because of their dreadlocks, revolutionary naturalist philosophy, roots in the African diaspora, or raw food diet, some outsiders have assumed that MOVE drew influence from Rastas. John Africa's niece, Debbie Sims Africa, stated, "I don't believe that MOVE was

influenced by Rastafarianism, while other beliefs or philosophies may seem similar, MOVE's belief is one, unparalleled to any other belief existing. Others deal in categories and separation. MOVE's is one of communion" (Cranston 2021, 25). A co-founder of the housing co-op where John Africa lived, David Finkelstein, has stated that he and Vince (as David knew him) discussed Eastern philosophy together (interview with author 7 August 2013). Although one can see distinct parallels to Zen Buddhism, Vedanta, or Daoism in MOVE teaching, John Africa has never mentioned any of them.

MOVE focused on practicalities of earning money through walking dogs or their car wash, lifestyle changes in diet and accommodations, and, most visibly, demonstrations against war, police, pollution, and the incarceration of animals. As one of the "MOVE 9," Janine Africa put it:

MOVE DON'T RESPECT THIS GOVERNMENT ... BECAUSE IT'S FALSE,
A LIE AND IT'S KILLING LIFE. IT'S POISONING THE AIR, THE WATER, THE
SOIL, IT'S DESTROYING THE PLANT LIFE, THE ANIMALS AND HUMANS
AS JOHN AFRICA TEACH—JUST BECAUSE IT'S LEGAL DON'T MAKE IT
RIGHT LEGALITY IS NOTHING BUT THE GOVERNMENT'S WAY OF
CONTROLLING THE POOR, THE MINORITY AND PROTECTING THE RICH.

(Janine Phillips Africa quoted in James 1999, 11–12, all caps in the original)

MOVE members first grabbed headlines when they raided the *Mike Douglas Show* during a screening and handcuffed Douglas to a chair in retaliation for the tranquilizing of a chimpanzee on a previous show (Fox 1974). As total liberation scholar-activist Anthony Nocella said, "I would say MOVE very much focuses on total liberation I do not think they mentioned it, but

lived it” (correspondence with author 21 January 2021). Perhaps John Africa did not mention it but MOVE supporter Abu-Jamal did. In the mid-90s, he wrote: “the MOVE Organization ... has as its *raison d’être* total liberation” (Abu-Jamal 1996, 67).

Yet, rather than describing separate issues as *connected*, MOVE described the focus as *one single priority*: Life. Instead of total liberation, John Africa spoke of “total *revolution*,” which entailed radical personal and social transformation, grasping the *totality* of “self” (that is, monism) and rejecting categories of separation (“black,” “white,” “left,” “right,” “up,” “down,” even numbers). For initiates, truly understanding this meant acknowledging John Africa as God, nature as God, and yourself as John Africa/nature/God. Right thinking would lead to right behaviour. Hence, they focused on “putting out information” or public education about the teaching: “Revolution is not imposed upon another, it is kindled within them” (*25 Years on the MOVE* 1997, 69). “Total revolution” also meant that John Africa’s revolution addressed every single problem facing the world with a final, definitive, and *practical* answer. As the MOVE booklet stated,

A person can talk about revolution, but if they are still worshipping money, or putting drugs into their body, or beating their mate, they obviously haven’t committed themselves to doing what’s right. Revolution is not a philosophy, it is an activity.

(ibid.)

MOVE’s activities soon led to more than 100 arrests, a 1976 confrontation with police that killed a MOVE infant, Life Africa, and a subsequent end to MOVE’s absolute aversion to “death-dealing guns.” They said: “If [police] came at us with fists, we were gonna come back

with fists, [but] ... if they came with guns, we'd use guns too" (ibid., 19). MOVE's communal home and headquarters had minimal technology and furniture yet housed dozens of stray dogs. After complaints from neighbours, police attempted to evict MOVE on charges of housing code violation. After a year-long siege, police stormed MOVE's home on August 8, 1978 and officer James Ramp died by a single bullet. A judge sentenced nine MOVE members thirty to one hundred years in prison for his death. The MOVE defendants claimed innocence. Rising young local journalist and former Black Panther, Mumia Abu-Jamal (born Wesley Cook), covered the case but, three years later, faced his own trial. After highly controversial proceedings in 1982, a nearly all-white jury sentenced Abu-Jamal to death for the 1981 killing of police officer Daniel Faulkner (Lindorff 2003). His case drew global attention and massive public support for a new trial (Black 2012). Abu-Jamal declared John Africa's teaching as his faith and claimed that the prison punished him because he refused to cut his dreadlocks (Abu-Jamal 1991). During the mid-1980s, MOVE campaigned aggressively for the release of fellow members from prison. As their agitation increased, police again surrounded the MOVE home on 13 May 1985 and, when MOVE members refused to leave the premises, police dropped a bomb that set the entire neighbourhood ablaze, killing eleven people (including five children) and leaving approximately 250 people homeless. The independent Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission (PSIC) described the children's deaths as "unjustified homicides" yet no court ever charged any city official for those deaths. Instead, a court sentenced Ramona Africa, the only adult survivor of the attack, to seven years in prison on charges of "riot and conspiracy" (Evans 2020, 249).

b. MOVE: Perceptions and Reception in the Anarchist and Punk Scenes

Dozens of punk bands and/or zines from Mischief Brew to Leftöver Crack, from prominent anarcho-punk zine *Profane Existence* to *Punk Planet*, have shown support for MOVE. Abu-Jamal's case received support from both grassroots hardcore bands (for example, Los Crudos, Anti-Flag, State of Fear, and Aus Rotten) and major acts (for example, Rage Against the Machine, Chumbawamba, Jello Biafra, and Bad Religion).⁶ Some instances seem more obvious such as The Proletariat's full-length release *Move* including their song "Move" as well as fellow Boston-based band Move—often referred to as "Move BHC"—whose first release pictured the MOVE bombing aftermath. Other instances seem obscure or unobvious such as Avail singer Tim Barry wearing an Abu-Jamal t-shirt in an inner sleeve band photo, Propagandhi naming their 2001 record *Today's Empires, Tomorrow's Ashes* after a quote from Abu-Jamal, or the Hardline-adjacent zine *A New Dawn Breaking* which included seven pages devoted to MOVE and Mumia Abu-Jamal. Many instances may never come to light as they took place behind the scenes. Brad Dingman, of Rochester-based vegan straight edge band Contempt and later author of the 2012 bioregionalist book *Reclamation*, shifted from Hardline activism to doing support work for MOVE in the late 90s/early 2000s (correspondence with anonymous source 13 June 2021; First Day 2001). Dan Lemley, of hardcore bands Bullets*In and Punch, adopted the moniker "Dan Africa" in 1994 to "support the MOVE movement" by informing people "about the bombing and those that were imprisoned" (correspondence with author 12 April 2021). Kevin Price, a vegan straight edger from Virginia, first encountered MOVE in 1997 and gradually transformed "from being a 14-year-old high school freshman, anarchist, atheist, punk rock teenager to being a twenty-year old who believed that John Africa was God" (Price 2021). His account also

described a type of total liberation: while he initially worked with animal rights groups, Food Not Bombs, MOVE, and the Zapatistas, he soon “came to see MOVE as encompassing all of those other causes and therefore working for MOVE was primary ... the union of all of those struggles” (ibid.). Other punk scene figures who have supported MOVE include Bruno “Break” Teixeira (New Winds), Sandeep “Sunny” Singh (hate5six), Epitaph Records (who linked to Abu-Jamal’s book *Have Black Lives Ever Mattered?* in 2020), and Soulside’s frontman Bobby Sullivan who devoted one section of his book *Revolutionary Threads* (2018) to MOVE and another to Abu-Jamal. Elsewhere, Sullivan said: “Ramona Africa herself was a tremendous influence on me. I spent a bunch of time with her.... MOVE was as much an influence on me as Rasta” (Warminsky 2014).

Support for MOVE in anarcho-punk zines mostly began in 1983 when Canadian anarchist journals closely tied to the Toronto Anarchist Black Cross (TABC), such as *Bulldozer*, *Reality Now*, *Wimmin Prisoners Survival Network*, and *Kick It Over*, gave positive coverage to MOVE and Mumia Abu-Jamal throughout the 1980s. Also TABC-affiliated, journals such as *Ecomedia* and *Prison News Service (PNS)* continued this support into the 1990s.⁷ Additional early, yet sporadic, support came from anarchist journals *Fifth Estate* (1978–1979) and *Overthrow* (1985). Non-anarchist revolutionary socialist journals such as *The Insurgent*, *Breakthrough*, *Political Women Prisoners in the U.S.*, and especially *Workers Vanguard* (associated with the Partisan Defense Committee [PDC]/Spartacist League) provided more consistent support. Prominent cartoonist Seth Tobocman’s work on Mumia Abu-Jamal in *World War 3 Illustrated* in 1989 undoubtedly helped spread the message to punk contexts (usually through reproduction in flyers and fanzines). Together, they helped usher MOVE into the US anarcho-punk scene first through *Profane Existence* (via *Ecomedia*), and later through the

revolutionary anarchist *Love and Rage* (including articles by Kedzie Throop, aka N. K. Stein, who wrote for both journals and anarchist historian Bob Helms). The breakthrough came in 1992. After an endorsement of MOVE/Abu-Jamal by QUISP (Queer Women and Men United In Support of Political Prisoners), *Love and Rage* put Mumia Abu-Jamal on its cover (and gave both MOVE and Abu-Jamal considerable coverage throughout the 90s). Later in 1992, *Profane Existence* put Abu-Jamal on their own cover and anarcho-punk zine *Wind Chill Factor* employed Tobocman's cartoons of Abu-Jamal on its cover (with articles on him and MOVE inside). In February 1993, *Love and Rage* included an article about Ramona Africa's visit to the local anarchist center that cited Delbert Africa asserting that anarchists and MOVE shared a common cause because "There shouldn't be any conflict per se, between any anarchist and MOVE because we don't believe in **any** form of external government.... This system's foot is on all our necks, so **all** of us should work to get it off" (Helms 1993, 2; emphasis in original).⁸ The article concluded with unambiguous support: "I feel that the 'new world' that we anarchists carry in our hearts ought to have plenty of room in it for the brave and committed militants of MOVE. Let's think of them as very much on our side" (ibid.).

After Governor Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania signed Abu-Jamal's death warrant in 1995, support for Abu-Jamal in punk and anarchist scenes exploded. That year, punk "bible" *Maximum Rocknroll* (MRR) published its first article on MOVE/Abu-Jamal that year, demonstrations took place across the country, and Ohio hosted an Abu-Jamal benefit concert with a variety of punk/hardcore bands (Haywire 1995; Black 2012). In 1997, Chumbawamba appeared on the David Letterman show and, during their hit song "Tubthumping," chanted "Free Mumia Abu-Jamal." The apex of support came perhaps in 1999 when Rage Against the Machine, Beastie

Boys, and Bad Religion drew a crowd of 17,000 people for a Mumia Abu-Jamal benefit concert.

Daniel Dylan Young wrote in *Green Anarchy*:

Personally, the largest Black Bloc that I've ever seen was at the Millions March for Mumia in Philadelphia in April of 1999. I'd say there were at least 500 dressed in black, masked up, and carrying banners such as 'Vegans for Mumia'.

(Young 2001, 13)

As Kevin Tucker of *Green Anarchy*, *Species Traitor*, and death metal band Peregrine, said: "info about Mumia and MOVE was EVERYWHERE during these times ... well known in all punk and radical circles at the time and regularly being talked about" (correspondence with author 22 March 2021, emphasis in original). Dead Kennedys singer Jello Biafra repeatedly released spoken word material by Abu-Jamal on his label Alternative Tentacles and, when Biafra ran for US President in the Green Party primary in 2000, he selected Abu-Jamal as Vice Presidential candidate. Political punk zine *IMPACT Press* put Abu-Jamal on its cover in May 1997 and later served as a primary forum for Steven Best's early activist writing as he edged toward total liberation in the early 2000s. One of MOVE's staunchest supporters in the punk scene, Steve Aoki (now a megastar DJ and producer who has worked with Linkin Park, LMFAO, Iggy Azalea, and Fall Out Boy), wrote the song "Revenge of John Africa" for the *On the MOVE 7* by This Machine Kills (2000).

In hindsight, punk support for MOVE and Abu-Jamal may seem self-evident. Yet, it took work and time to raise support for them. White Earth First! activists such as Derek Wall in the UK and Robcat in the US campaigned heavily in activist circles for MOVE. Robcat wrote in *Fifth Estate*, "Along with comrades from New Hampshire and New Jersey, we fought to get the

Earth First! Journal staff to list MOVE prisoners on their Prisoner Support page. It took many angry letters to get it to happen” (Robcat 2018). More recently, Robcat stated, “MOVE are the original green anarchists ... pioneers [who] saw the whole picture.” Describing them as “one of the most positive influences in my life,” he added, “MOVE was a huge influence on Earth First! in Maine, New Hampshire, and New Jersey and probably other people too.... They were ahead of their time. And they have never gotten credit for it.” I asked him why not. “Because they’re mostly Black,” he answered (interview with author 2 February 2021). Similarly, Rod Coronado stated, “I’m sure a big part of why [MOVE] haven’t been more recognized is that they were an African-American fringe group with lifestyles that even privileged white activists could not relate to” (correspondence with author 21 January 2021). Tomas Squip (now Onam Emmet) of DC punk band Beefeater said of MOVE,

I had a lot of admiration [but perceived them as] a little localized, small-scale, and also a bit quixotic ... tainted by negative propaganda and reports I’d hear about them, right or wrong ... maybe a bit ‘messiah-driven’ cultish group, less than a viable movement. Plus, let’s face it, punk was always heavily white.”

(interview with author 13 May 2021)

c. MOVE: 2000–Onward

In 2001, a judge overturned Abu-Jamal’s death sentence. In 2011, another court upheld the ruling and commuted Abu-Jamal to a life sentence. He remains incarcerated with serious health issues (including hepatitis, covid-19, and heart problems). The “MOVE 9” finally exited prison after forty years (beginning with Debbie in 2018 and ending with Chuck Africa in 2020).

The early 2000s, however, saw a toxic child custody dispute between John Africa's widow Alberta Africa and her ex-husband/MOVE supporter John Gilbride. Straight edgers, former Krishna adherents, and MOVE supporters, Lori Allen and Tony Allen (from Virginia Beach band Faceless), helped lead the verbal harassment and protests against Gilbride. Yet, after Gilbride's still unresolved murder in 2002, the Allens left MOVE and Tony waged a decade-long campaign against MOVE accusing them of having murdered Gilbride (police never identified a suspect). Recently, several MOVE members, children, and supporters (including Kevin Price) left MOVE, citing internal abuse, "cult" behaviour, and the unresolved Gilbride case as reasons (Stokes 2021). In a group of about sixty people, the departure of seven adults (and at least as many children and supporters) strikes a heavy blow. In addition to the bombing and defections, MOVE also lost members to cancer and other similar causes inside and outside of prison including three of the "MOVE 9," Merle (1998), Phil (2015), and Delbert (2020) and, most recently, Consuewella Africa (2021). The international news that Princeton University and Penn Museum had displayed bones from Consuewella's children who died in the 1985 bombing came out shortly prior to her passing (*Guardian* Staff 2021). Ramona Africa's stroke and cancer in 2018 pulled her back from her spokesperson role. On more positive notes, the recent docu-drama *The Inheritance* (2020) brought newly released MOVE members into the set, and the 2020 HBO documentary *40 Years a Prisoner* told the story of Mike Africa Jr., born in prison to MOVE members in 1978 and reunited with both of his parents at age forty.

3 Hardline

a. Hardline: Introduction and Philosophy

In the mid-late 1980s, a young vegan anarcho-punk in Laguna Beach, California named Sean formed a band named Vegan Reich (in which he wrote all of the songs). In 1989, he founded a label named Hardline Records and gradually formulated an accompanying ideology, soon proclaiming Hardline as “the first highly organized revolutionary struggle to be built around and fighting for the equality of all life” (Vanguard 1992, 4). Penned entirely by Sean, the first ten-page issue of Hardline zine *Vanguard* bore the tagline “On the front line for earth liberation,” included the Hardline manifesto, and served as a catechism for believers. The manifesto declared:

The time has come for an ideology and for a movement that is both physically and morally strong enough, to do battle against the forces of evil that are destroying the earth (and all life upon it). One that cannot be bought, nor led astray by temptation. A movement free of the vices that sedate the mind and weaken the body. An ideology that is pure and righteous, without contradictions or inconsistencies. One that judges all things by one standard and emphasizes personal responsibility and accountability above all else.

(Vanguard 1992, 1)

In essence, Hardline stood for strict veganism and militant animal liberation first and foremost. Yet it wed them to a “single ethic” that “all innocent life is sacred” entailing defence of life from the larger Earth ecosystem to tiny fetuses. It rejected both communism and “the capitalist system (where all life is deemed an expendable resource)” as well as “the intrinsic flaw of single issue

causes, where the concept of justice is always a selective one.” Those who violated the ethic of life’s sanctity would lose their “rights,” leaving them fair game for Hardliners to deal out “justice” (ibid.). One passage in the first issue of *Vanguard* concisely articulated the intersection of Earth, human, and animal liberation:

In South America, indigenous peoples are massacred because they try to continue living in their tribal homeland—the jungle, which ranchers want for beef production. Peasants of third world countries are enslaved to grow cash crops—from sugar and coffee to heroin, pot and cocaine.

(ibid., 8)

Hardline (or rather Sean) demanded uniformity of belief, forbade Hardliners to “embrace only certain aspects” of the ideology or attempt “to debate or change” Hardline: “One either believes in Hardline as a whole or they do not. Those who do not are not Hardline” (ibid., 5). Eternal and all-encompassing, “Hardline is a philosophy which addresses all aspects of existence” and “has existed since the dawn of time. It is the true way and path that springs forth from the root of creation” (ibid., 8).

Hardline also forbade drug use, abortion, and “deviant sexual acts” (ibid., 1). *Vanguard* 1 described same-sex attraction as an “obvious deviation” and mused: “Perhaps if we accepted homosexuality more people would accept Hardline.... And perhaps suicide is the only answer for those who can’t live on their feet and stand by what they believe” (ibid., 9, 8). In letters published in *Profane Existence* and *MRR*, Sean stated outright his “hate” for homosexuals and homosexuality, “which must be spoken out against and combatted” and, in interviews published in *MAS* and *Caring Edge*, he explicitly advocated a “vegan dictatorship” (O’Hara 1999;

Sean/Vegan Reich 1990, 1989b; Vegan Reich 1989). In the second issue of *Vanguard*, Sean wrote in an article entitled “Natural Law”: “Abortion is not a ‘right’, just as murder is not a ‘right’.... Abortion must be made illegal!” (Sean/Vegan Reich 1993, 17–18). *Vanguard* 6 included a dead fetus on the cover while an article inside celebrated the 1994 assassination of abortion doctor John Britton as “justifiable” (Mike/Memphis Hardline 1995, 8). So the questions of homosexuality and abortion appeared quite central to Hardline and not just marginal topics. In contrast, despite supporting “the Black Liberation and Indigenous people’s resistance movements,” issues of *Vanguard* devoted a little coverage to Indigenous people but not one article on racism/Black liberation.

Hardline rejected “man made religion” and harkened to an untainted Eden (hence, the slogan “Forward to Eden”): “Hardline sees our natural state to be pre-civilization and pre-culture ... [and] strive for [truth] wherever it can be found” (ibid., 6). Yet, to clearly see truth, one needed a clear body and mind, eschewing “animal products, caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and all drugs, chemically refined and processed foods such as white flour, white rice, sugar and artificial colors, flavors and preservatives.” By means of “exercise, right thoughts and right deeds” one could “achieve a oneness with that natural order, and live the way we’re meant to.... This is our solution. Not only for ourselves, but for the world” (ibid., 6).

Neither the Hardline manifesto nor *Vanguard* specifically cited influences although Sean included a verse from the Qur’an and a yin-yang symbol in *Vanguard* 1 (1992, 2, 9). Later issues of *Vanguard* typically recommended books such as Earth First!’s *Eco-Defense: A Guide to Monkeywrenching* and *Unnatural Order* by Jim Mason. After the 1991 release of *A Declaration of War: Killing People to Save Animals and the Environment* by “Screaming Wolf,” Hardliners

quickly integrated it into their early canon.⁹ We can discern early influences when we trace Sean's personal journey.

In his first letter to *MRR* in 1984, fifteen-year-old Sean tried to reconnect with a friend who had moved back to Sweden. He mentioned nothing related to activism and signed off “Sean Panno” (Panno 1984). Soon though, he got heavily influenced by LA gang-associated punk bands such as Circle One and Suicidal Tendencies and even more so by British anarcho-punk bands such as Conflict, Flux of Pink Indians, The Apostles, Rudimentary Peni, and a sober vegan anarcho-punk named Patrick Poole aka “Rat” of Statement, Unborn, and The Apostles. By 1987, Sean started Common Ground which distributed bands such as Screaming Foetus (South Africa). In 1988, he founded the label No Master's Voice through which he released The Apostles, Naturecore, and the international animal liberation/punk compilation LP *The ALF Is Watching and There's No Place to Hide ...* with bands such as Chumbawamba, Statement, Beefeater (with Ian MacKaye on backup vox), Oi Polloi, Toxic Waste, Power Age, and the first song by Vegan Reich: “Stop Talking—Start Revenging” (Crustcave 2018). Early in 1989, Sean implied a straight edge influence when he wrote, “straight edge, vegan” in his ad for band mates in *MRR* (Sean/Vegan Reich 1989a, 44). His first ad for Hardline Records in 1989 also mentioned straight edge and contained no actual logo beyond an X. Yet, other band/activist logos around him likely influenced his eventual design (see Circle One, The Apostles, and ROCKS in Figure 1).¹⁰ One can also note that revolutionary circles often used AK-47 machine guns (as we see in the UK-based Apostles) yet the U.S.-based bands Circle One and ROCKS both used M-16s.



Figure 1, L to R: Circle One (logo design by Mike Ituarte, 1983), Source: Eeyore (2022a, 263); Earth First! (artwork by John Zaelit, 1981; The Apostles (design by Andy Martin/The Apostles, 1985, adapted from a design by *Pigs For Slaughter*/Anarchist Youth Federation, 1981), Source: Eeyore (2022a, 300); ROCKS (logo design by Bill “Posters” Webb, 1989).

Sean’s Hardline 1990 ad in *MRR* announced a “New Movement” beginning with three 7” records: Vegan Reich’s *Hardline*, Statement’s *Prepare for Battle*, and Raid’s *Words of War* (MRR 1990). The ad included two Hardline logos. One had a revamped X (which “referenced a link to Malcolm X, as well as [Hardline] purposely trying to co-opt straight edge imagery to get kids into the revolutionary struggle”) and crossed M-16s (“[Hardline] decided to use guns with ammo that would be more readily available in the States should stuff pop off, so to speak”) (Sean cited in Rettman 2017: 269). The other Hardline logo lifted from cartoonist Ron Cobb’s 1969 ecology symbol with the added word “Hardline” and an inserted Earth (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Hardline logo 1 (design by Sean Muttaqi, 1990), Source: Eeyore (2022a, 300); Hardline logo 2 (design by Sean Muttaqi/Ron Cobb, 1990), Source: Eeyore (2022a, 300); Gather *Total Liberation* EP (artwork by Empty Design Coalition/Adam Hunt, 2005).

By the next year, Hardliners had their first “Survival of the Fittest” gathering in Memphis, Tennessee where Hardline had acquired its largest and most ardent following. Also around this

time, a Hardline ideological declaration appeared in an obscure zine named *Ascention* by Sean's pen pal Scott Beibin in New Jersey. The single-page anonymously authored text began: "In the beginning, things were as one.... To change society the individual must find their true self ... the oneness and sameness of all life." The author added: "I, like the other proponents of hardline, am merely a prophet—revealing truths that are part of our instinctual memory" (Anonymous 1991, 38).

Yet Hardline soon lost its prophet and key apostles: Raid, the most popular band in the scene, disbanded and left Hardline in 1992. Sean left Hardline by early 1993. MTV reporter Ryan Downey (Hardball) took over *Vanguard* in 1993 but left by the end of the year. Almost precisely when Hardline began to flounder, militant vegan straight edge took off. Partly inspired by Vegan Reich and initially supportive of Hardline, Earth Crisis took the hardcore scene by storm (Granholm 2012, 33; Peterson 2009, 241; xYosefx 2008). DJ Rose would soon lift from the Earth First! design to make the Earth Crisis logo of crossed wrenches (see Figure 3). This contrast of crossed wrenches (as opposed to the crossed guns of Hardline) seemed to signal a focus more on direct action than weapons fetishism or revolutionary romanticism.¹¹

Meanwhile, Sean started reggae band Captive Nation Rising and founded Uprising Records in 1994 before converting to Islam in 1995 and adopting the name Shahid 'Ali Muttaqi. Uprising would later release major acts such as Fall Out Boy which included Andy Hurley of Vegan Reich and ex-Hardliner Pete Wentz (Eeyore 2022a, 280). He also released benefit compilation *Ceremony of Fire* (1995) to support Rod Coronado (wherein Captive Nation Rising dedicated their song to both Coronado and Mumia Abu-Jamal and "all people of color held captive by this racist injustice system").

From 1995–1996, David Agranoff (*Voicebox*) took over *Vanguard* for issues 6 and 7. Yet, clearly dissatisfied with Agranoff’s open and internal critique of Hardline dogma and behaviour, Sean Muttaqi stepped in with others to put out *Vanguard* 8 and wrest control from Agranoff. Sean centralized power into a “Hardline Central Committee” but soon dissolved Hardline altogether. *Vanguard* 8 also took on a new millenarian tone of impending guerilla warfare and sacred duty to work toward an actual vegan revolution in the near future. According to activist and author Peter Young, “*Vanguard* 8 does have a weird power. I must have read it like 300 times. I’ve always been atheist but it felt like everything Hardline was doing was leading up to that” (interview with author 3 March 2021).

In 1999, Sean claimed for the first time that MOVE had influenced the creation of Hardline (in the liner notes to Vegan Reich’s *Jihad* EP):

CORE MILITANTS ... BEING HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY THE
POLITICS OF MALCOLM X AND MOVE AS WELL AS THE SPIRITUAL
DOCTRINES OF TAOISM, RASTAFARIANISM AND ISLAM, WENT ON TO
FOUND A REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT KNOWN AS HARDLINE.

(Vegan Reich 1999; all caps in original)

Years later, Muttaqi again cited MOVE as an early influence: “After the [MOVE] bombing in 1985 a couple of the members came out to the L.A. area and I got exposed to a lot of their ideas and philosophy, which was very influential” and “I was really impacted by groups like M.O.V.E. [MOVE], as well” (Peterson 2009, 484, 93). Ryan Downey (Hardball, Burn It Down, *Vanguard*) seemed to confirm MOVE’s early influence (Rettman 2017, 273). Also, later iterations of the Hardline spirit, found in Ahl-i Allah and Taliyah al-Mahdi, cited MOVE more often and

provided links and references to MOVE on their websites. Taliyah member Naj One said, “Long live John Africa, [MOVE] are ... one of the first groups to recognize the exploitation of animals and the planet” (Mackeena 2010). Ex-Hardliner Walter Bond also cited MOVE as an influence (Bond 2011a, 11, 91). Yet, no evidence exists that MOVE influenced Hardline’s genesis. Perhaps, as suggested elsewhere, if Sean *had* mentioned MOVE in 1990, he could not have claimed Hardline as the first movement to fight for *all* life (for this suggestion and more on MOVE-Hardline links, see Eeyore 2022a, 162–68).

In the wake of Hardline, Sean joined up with Micah Collins, who had edited Hardline zine *Destroy Babylon* (1994–1996), to form Ahl-i Allah (c. 1999–2001) and then Taliyah al-Mahdi, and who gained perhaps most notoriety when Collins/Naziri celebrated the Space Shuttle Columbia explosion in 2003 because it carried Israeli fighter pilot Ilan Ramon (Fiscella 2012: 269). Agranoff, in turn, formed the short-lived network Education for a Sustainable Future (ESF) during 1999 which retained Hardline’s opposition to abortion but, according to former member Ned Dorff, “definitely rejected homophobia” and “ESF seemed to be where vegan straight edge and Hardline met in the middle” (correspondence with author 30–31 December 2020 and 1 March 2021).

The later groups—first Ahl-i Allah and then Taliyah al-Mahdi (virtually indistinguishable from one another in ideological terms)—mostly retained emphasis on the same issues as Hardline. Yet, they toned down veganism, added Quranic references, and amped up the millenarianism and theosophical-type syncretism. Their eight-step process of esoteric initiation involved inspiration from M. R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen (vegetarian Sufi who founded a fellowship in Philadelphia in 1973) and the book *Muhammad’s Allah* (1994) by heterodox Turkish philosopher Ahmed Hulusi (source of the rumoured association of *djinn* with space aliens). They

emphasized “Gnosis” and monistic *tawhid* (divine unity) as in Naziri’s quote of Hulusi: “All particles are interconnected with each other and the Universe viewed as composed of ‘parts’ is in fact organized by a basic WHOLENESS” (Naziri 2001, 6). Both websites included “Islamicized” versions of the Hardline manifesto (see Eeyore 2022a, 255–59).

b. Hardline: Perceptions and Reception in the Anarchist and Punk Scenes

Hardline’s homepage in 1999 listed eighteen Hardline chapters (twelve in the US, four in Europe, one in Brazil, and one in Australia) yet, as Hughes noted: “Individual Hardline ‘chapters’ of varying officialdom could number as few as one or two members” (2018, 82). Dozens of bands across the US, Europe, and South America have had Hardline members or close ties to Hardline at some point such as Day of Suffering, Birthright, Hardball, Racetractor, Green Rage, Abnegation, and Slavearc but few fully and openly Hardline bands existed. Maybe less than a dozen women ever got actively involved in Hardline but at least one, Michelle Borok of Memphis Hardline, put out zines such as *Gaia Screams* and *Invictus* in 1995.

On one hand, as animal liberationist Walter Bond claimed, during the 90s, Hardline bands “got the youth focused like a laser beam on radical and fanatical Animal Liberation activism by blending the best elements of the struggles for Earth, Animals, anti-racism and anti-capitalism” with the gravity and “purity” mindset of fundamentalists (Bond 2011b). Michelle in Memphis wrote in *Vanguard 6*: “Our movement is so wonderfully unique in that we are devoted to total earth liberation, not scenes or single issues” (Michelle 1995: 22).

On the other hand, by placing an activist edge to anti-abortion and anti-homosexual views, Hardline immediately embraced territory previously held almost exclusively by Christian

fundamentalists and neo-Nazis. Many in the punk scene treated them as such. Tim Yohannan of *MRR* called Sean “Hitleresque” and, foreshadowing Tsitsos’ analysis, Kent McClard of *HeartattaCk* wrote of Hardline as “gun-loving, homophobic, ‘pro-life’ ... hardcore-machismo ... [which] is as threatening to the American way of life as baseball, apple pie, and hot dogs” (Sean/Vegan Reich 1989b; McClard 1991). Kevin Tucker wrote in regard to Taliyah (and particularly Naziri’s writing), “I don’t trust anyone whose ideology reads like a Dr. Bronner’s bottle. That stuff was all the nonsense of hardline emboldened with infantile takes on jihadist propaganda” (correspondence with author 21 March 2021).

Nonetheless, as Bond noted, some people took their message to heart and put their words into action. Inspired by bands like Vegan Reich, Raid, and Earth Crisis, Peter Young released thousands of minks and other animals from captivity, lived eight years as a fugitive, and finally served two years in prison. He said, “It feels selective to pick out Hardline. There’s an underbelly to everything. It’s important to ask: Not ‘Was it right?’ but ‘Was it useful?’” (interview with author 3 March 2021). Bond himself, convicted of illegal animal liberation activity in 2010, attempted a revival of the scene under the name “Vegan Hardline” (Bond 2011b). Hardline also influenced a number of lesser-known activists convicted of direct actions in the 1990s ranging from release of minks to burning down fast food restaurant construction including “The Memphis Three” (J. P. Goodwin, Jesse Keenan, and Mike Karban), Alex Slack of Lifeless, and Josh Anderson. Hardliners Josh Ellerman, Colby Ellerman, and David Agranoff also got arrested for direct actions yet all three cooperated with police (in Agranoff’s case against the already—and still—incarcerated Marie, now Marius, Mason).

c. Hardline: 2000–Onward

Ahl-i Allah and Taliyah al-Mahdi disappeared by 2006 and Hardline as an organization remains dead. The ideas, however, continued to live on in various ways. In Eastern Europe and Russia, some nationalist straight edgers adopted Hardline as their own, prompting Sean to respond in 2017 by repeating Hardline’s antiracist and anti-xenophobic positions and shortly after organized a second Vegan Reich reunion (Vegan Reich 2017). Walter Bond left prison in the summer of 2020 and immediately started a Web page with animal liberationist Camille Marino entitled Vegan Final Solution. Its open misanthropy led many previous supporters and anarchists to disavow them as “fascist” (Anarchists Worldwide 2020).

In December 2020, Micah Collins/Adam Naziri re-launched and revamped the Taliyah al-Mahdi website. Naziri claimed that Taliyah had gone into “occultation” for fifteen years while continuously training and quietly growing. He published yet another version of the Hardline manifesto referencing MOVE, and adding three words at the end: “for TOTAL LIBERATION” (Taliyah al-Mahdi 2021).¹² This version also appeared in the booklet accompanying the LP *Ready to Kill for the Cult* by Forward to Eden (a German vegan straight edge project by Tim Rule who runs Bound By Modern Age Records). However, Forward to Eden’s version bore the title “Natural Order (MOVE)ment Manifesto” with a wrench-gun version of the Hardline logo. Rule’s conception of Hardline rejects its previous positions on homosexuality and abortion but retains its extreme sectarian millenarianism. Thus, in combining the old Hardline logo with the wrench from the Earth Crisis logo, Rule’s version implied an ideological middle ground between Earth Crisis and Hardline (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Earth Crisis (design by DJ Rose, 1996), Source: Eeyore (2022b, 445); Forward to Eden/Natural Order (MOVE)ment (design by Tim Rule, 2021) Source: Eeyore (2022a, 300).

Regarding Hardline’s final impact, one can agree with earlier descriptions of the scene as “tiny” and “limited to a few groups with few releases and very small following” (O’Hara 1999, 149). And yet, one can also acknowledge, as Kurt Schroeder (Birthright, Catalyst Records) said, Hardline had a “huge influence ... on the vegan straight edge movement in the beginning.... Most of the vegan bands in the hardcore scene either had members who were hardline (or paid lip-service to the ideology), or were influenced by earlier hardline bands” (Kuhn 2010, 150). It also inspired a small number of radical activists to engage in a series of direct actions and even longer-term organizing. Peter Young said:

I’ve never identified as Hardline but I respect the impact of the movement.

A lot of people were more into Hardline but would not admit it because of the stigma. People don’t want explain to their kids what they were like at the time.

Like the idea of concentration camps for non-vegans.... Yet, no Vegan Reich, no Earth Crisis. People were hungry for Hardline without the negative elements....

Vegan straight edge came out of Hardline

(interview with author 3 March 2021).

J. P. Goodwin, one of the early Memphis Hardliners, founded the now-international Coalition to Abolish the Fur Trade (CAFT) in 1994 (Brooke 1996). The drift of Hardliners into Islam also

seems to constitute the first self-consciously organized group of “Muslims” in the punk scene at least five years prior to the taqwacore scene (Fiscella 2012: 268). Finally, one can also see that Hardline and Hardline-associated zines and bands disseminated an early discourse of total liberation—even while burdening it with exclusion-based anti-homosexual diatribes.

4 Total Liberation

In 1996, one could see a subtle overlap of MOVE, Hardline, and Total Liberation start to emerge in the fourth issue of *Destroy Babylon*. A member of Day of Suffering advocated “Earth/animal/human liberation,” a Hardline Europe ad included *20 Years on the MOVE*, the issue featured a three-page article on Abu-Jamal, and another article called to “liberate the Earth, the animals, to fight for indigenous peoples and all who are held under the hand of oppression” by purifying “their bodies and minds through fitness, meditation and nutrition” (*Destroy Babylon* 1996, 60, 28, 21–23, 43). Although the term “total liberation” had had generic meanings for decades, it seemed to expand to include Earth and/or animal liberation sometime in the late 1980s/early 1990s with diverse implications and references such as Jain karma (Chapple 1993, 107), Zen activism (Habito 1989, xi), pro-Earth misanthropy (Knight 1992, 12), and focus on animal liberation (ALF 1992, 15). Those who engaged more closely with the *meaning* of contemporary “total liberation” often used other umbrella terms such as anarchism, anarcho-punk, or phrases such as “One Struggle” (Crass 2013, xvii, 112, 114; ICAS 2021). The closest to its current sense first appeared in academia perhaps in the dissertation entitled *Total Liberation* by John Walter Quiring (1994) where he laid out a vision for an egalitarian and ecocentric worldview that included, but did not prioritize, animal rights. No one seems to have yet noticed or cited his work. In 1996, the LA-based Alternative Gathering Collective (AGC), associated

with anarcho-punk band Total Chaos, briefly changed its name to Total Liberation (BYOFL 1996, 13). Around 1998, a *Total Liberation* webzine started with an emphasis on anarcho-punk, vegan straight edge, and links to both MOVE and Hardline (Hanford 1998; Total Liberation 1999). Also in 1998, Hardline-adjacent band Birthright wrote in the liner notes to their *Out of Darkness* release: “self-liberation is earth liberation is animal liberation is human liberation. They are the same, all struggles are one.” Around this time, things began to come to a head for the genesis of the Total Liberation scene.

A driving force appeared in the group Liberation Collective in Oregon. Two of its members, Craig Rosebraugh and Leslie James Pickering, founded the North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office in 1999. The same year Rosebraugh, of the anarcho-punk band Unamused, “had his arm broken by the Portland Police during a protest in support of political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal” (Rosebraugh 2021). Vegan straight edger Leslie James Pickering produced a zine named *FOOD* based on quotes taken from his personal correspondence with incarcerated MOVE members. Pickering stated:

MOVE was key to me and everyone I knew had known of them in one way or another.... I read through MOVE’s booklet *25 Years on the MOVE* and felt blown away. Inspirational to me personally. We tabled it at events. We ran off hundreds—even thousands—of copies of it and gave them out.

(Interview with author 27 January 2021)¹³

Also in 1999, Liberation Collective produced a newspaper entitled *Resistance* which began with several pages about and by MOVE members and Mumia Abu-Jamal as well as an article on CAFT by former Hardliner J. P. Goodwin, and a column by another activist initially inspired by

anarcho-punk: Rod Coronado (Kuipers 2009, 81). The same year, a young white high school student and vegan straight edger named Dan Berger organized the first Total Liberation conference in Boca Raton, Florida 12–15 February 1999. There, he gathered people from Earth, animal, and human liberation circles including Liberation Collective, Refuse and Resist, Earth First!, Food Not Bombs, ABC, the ALF Press Office, AIM, and MOVE. Berger went vegan while living in Syracuse during the mid-90s heyday of Earth Crisis and then moved to Boca Raton where he founded a chapter of Animal Defense League, read about antiracist feminism through bell hooks and others, and hatched the idea for the first Total Liberation gathering:

In the animal rights movement at the time, there was a lot of talk of uniting different struggles, but few connections were really being made. Of the links that were actually made, most revolved around the predominantly white radical environmental movement.

He credited personal friend Heather LaCapria and other people—mostly women—as leading the charge for a “broader analysis” and challenging “oppression in the movement.” Berger stated that “despite having speakers from AIM [Sheridan Murphy] and MOVE [Ramona and Sue Africa], the conference was almost all white” and the subsequent critique “for creating such a white conference under the name ‘total liberation’ was a challenging but utterly important process for me” (Crass 2005, 21).

Total Liberation gatherings soon appeared in Denver, Los Angeles, and Olympia—each with their own flavour and emphasis. Little remains available online or in literature documenting these events but most attention usually goes to the final and most prominent gathering of this period: the Total Liberation Fest (10–11 January 2004) in Erie, Pennsylvania and the subsequent Total Liberation Tour that July. These two pivotal events gathered the members of the band

Gather who started their band after attending the conference and joined the tour that summer.¹⁴

The conference advertised speakers such as former *Vanguard* editor David Agranoff, Rod Coronado, Ramona Africa, Kevin Tucker, Leslie James Pickering, and Steven Best as well as bands such as Tears of Gaia, Rogue Nation, Purified in Blood, and Purification. According to Gather's drummer Dustin Hall: "learning about [MOVE] helped radicalize us all" (correspondence with author 31 December 2020). The Total Liberation Tour of July 2004 also included militant vegan straight edge band Seven Generations, hip hop giants Dead Prez, and Taliyah-associated rappers Amir Sulaiman, Naj One, and Abdul Shahid Mustafa. The main organizer for the tour, Ian Hamilton (now Ian Thunder), had previously engaged in Hardline and maintained ties to people involved in Taliyah including Micah Collins whom he had booked for the tour. This caused an intense online debate because of Collins/Naziri's vocal opposition to homosexuality and led to the cancellation of his participation. However, both Collins and Agranoff spoke at the Total Liberation event in Los Angeles—also attended by Sean Muttaqi (anonymous correspondence with author 3 March 2021). By then, however, Hamilton had already bailed on the tour. Blaming pressure from the police, low turnout, and thousands of dollars in debt, he abandoned both the tour and total liberation circles (Total Liberation 2004).

The same year, 2004, Gather released their demo with a zine that included an essay entitled "Total Liberation" that saw "Animal, Humyn, and Earth liberation struggles," as one struggle that embraced "equality for the elderly, queer, and disabled" as well as "liberation of oppressed and exploited native humyn cultures" and "Personal Liberation" that, unlike straight edge, "refers to whichever requisite re-conditionings are appropriate to each individual activist" (DL 2004). Gather also seems to have written the first "Total Liberation" song in 2004, re-released as the *Total Liberation 7*" on New Eden Records (who also released Naj One). Like the

Hardline logo, the Gather 7” used Ron Cobb’s ecology logo yet replaced the trademark Hardline elements with the words “Vegan Straight Edge” (see Figure 2). The visual/textual development reflected an ideological reclaiming of radical ecology without the undesired baggage of Hardline’s sexual politics. xTRUE NATUREx covered Gather’s “Total Liberation” track in 2008 while other bands such as Alert (2009) and No Holds Barred (2018) recorded different songs named “Total Liberation” (and, in the spirit of Hardline, Vegan Militia, a solo project from Spain, released a track in 2013 entitled “Totalitarian Liberation” which declared that if compassion meant fascism then they welcomed the “fascist” label. From about 2006 (and especially since 2014), total liberation began to gain currency within academia via Steven Best, Anthony Nocella, David Pellow, and numerous others. In general, total liberation scenes rejected both “single issue” activism as well as sectarianism. In doing so, they adopted a forum approach.

Carol Glasser (2015) argued that, as tempting as it sounds to put the Earth first, Earth liberation depends on applying intersectionality, solidarity, and cooperation to make it happen. Citing Colling, she argued that activists must reject the notion that “one form of oppression is central and others merely peripheral” because total liberation “requires inclusive approaches to social justice that recognize the commonalities of the oppressed rather than the differences” (Glasser 2015, 45–46). Upon these commonalities, one uses the shared total liberation forum to build coalitions. Total liberation scenes tend not to emphasize theology but activists/scholars do occasionally address it. Lisa Kemmerer discussed total liberation and monism via Hinduism (“all reality is ultimately one”), Buddhism (“We *are* the toad, we *are* the pond—we and they are one”), and Daoism (the “Great Unity of Being” which affirms that “every link in the web of life is critical to every other link”) (2015, 71, 73, 75).

In contrast to MOVE and Hardline’s insular “single truth” approach, Kemmerer presented Eastern conceptions of oneness as a tool to tie together existing struggles rather than a single answer for all:

Exploring Eastern philosophy and religions can help mitigate the [white/European] tendency to view social justice causes as separate and distinct.... Asian philosophies teach whether we advocate for earth and animals or against corporate capitalism and patriarchy is of little importance *so long as we engage in activism.*

(2015, 76 emphasis in original)

5 Concluding Thoughts

As this article has shown, MOVE and vegan straight edge, through the work of the Liberation Collective and especially Dan Berger, helped spawn the first Total Liberation gathering in 1999. Inspired largely by British anarcho-punk, Hardline, with a revolutionary ideology nearly identical to MOVE, helped spawn the vegan straight edge scene and, especially through Ian Hamilton’s work, the influential 2004 Total Liberation Fest and Tour which, in turn, helped spawn total liberation as we currently know it. This implies neither a necessary nor linear chain of causality. Yet it does point to a neglected aspect in the history of total liberation, a scene that seems at least partly indebted to activists who came from, worked with, and/or felt inspired by MOVE and/or Hardline specifically as well as anarcho-punk and vegan straight edge scenes more generally.

The images in this article showed an evolutionary genealogy of logos in which the X of crossed-guns and/or wrenches, as well as the ecology symbol, came to symbolize Hardline or

Hardline-adjacent values. MOVE, without a logo or “brand” image, had to rely on others (for example, Seth Tobocman or photographs of the bombing) to graphically further their message in the punk scene.

Finally, this article showed an emerging epistemic context influenced by insular groups based on a single truth of oneness in which adherents conformed to a uniform ideology. Although comprising only a small part of the broader context of anarcho-punks, vegan straight edgers, and Earth/animal liberationists, these groups (Hardline and MOVE) helped influence the birth of a diverse scene based on the principles of a forum in which participants agree on the most commonly shared denominators. This meant that the transition from Total Liberation to total liberation also seemed to focus less on sobriety, self-discipline, “natural law,” and monism and instead added women’s reproductive rights and queer-positive perspectives.

As with Eastern philosophies such as Zen, Vedanta, and philosophical Daoism, MOVE and Hardline emphasized oneness rather than “single issues” and yet, in contrast to mainstream Eastern philosophies, they also insisted on revolutionary systemic change. In doing so, they presaged total liberation. Yet, certain issues, perhaps inherited in part from mainstream Christian church positions in US society at large, proved out of step with their subcultural social surroundings and potential supporters. While MOVE downplayed their official position on homosexuality and abortion, Hardline emphasized it and this, in turn, seems to have contributed to their pariah status and obscurity. Of course, other factors contributed to Hardline’s demise such as Hardline’s founders abandoning the scene and Hardliners’ perceived “white male” privileged status. Likewise, other factors undoubtedly contributed to MOVE’s growth in popularity in punk and anarchist scenes in the 1990s such as the widely publicized police assaults on MOVE, the killing of their founder and MOVE children, the ubiquity of Abu-Jamal’s

death penalty case, and MOVE people's lack of class and racial privilege. Perhaps racism worked to MOVE's disadvantage when dealing with police and courts, to MOVE's advantage in dealing with antiracist activists in the early Total Liberation scene, and to MOVE's disadvantage when scholars later wrote the history of total liberation.

The anonymous author of *Total Liberation* (2019) asked how total liberation might move forward: "if not formal organisation, what instead? ... how do we make total liberation a *revolutionary* movement?" and saw some hope in the Kurdish-based "Rojava Revolution" (Anonymous 2019, 39, 28, 60). Rather than looking forward, this article discussed connections between MOVE, anarcho-punk, Hardline, vegan straight edge, and total liberation while maintaining the idea that sometimes we can gain some understanding here and now by looking backward.

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Footnotes

¹ Anarcho-punk refers to an explicitly anarchist punk scene initiated in the late 1970s and typically associated with British bands such as Crass, Poison Girls, and Chumbawamba (see, for example, Dines and Worley 2016).

² Ian MacKaye of the early DC hardcore band Minor Threat coined the term “straight edge” in 1981 and the term now loosely describes a movement of people who reject drugs, alcohol, and promiscuity (see, for example, Haenfler 2006; Kuhn 2010).

³ Capitalization here designates the formal Total Liberation gatherings, scene, and organizations that used the phrase. The same goes for Hardline.

⁴ Neither MOVE nor Hardliners, of course, self-identified as a sect. Both refused to characterize John Africa and Sean as “leader” or “central figure who wants to create a centralized form of allegiance” even though they each functioned as such. Also, as Sean stated, “Hardline had people from a Buddhist, Christian or Judaic framework, and we weren’t trying to erase whatever sort of cultural milieu they were coming from” and used this degree of diversity to reject the “cult” label (Peterson 2009, 488). While ostensibly accurate at some level, Hardline spoke as if they had the only true interpretation and practice of Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, etc. They didn’t erase those frameworks; they directed them. In regard to directing their faith toward radical, ecological ends, both groups find parallels in what Bron Taylor termed “dark green religion” (2010).

⁵ To avoid anachronistically referring to him as “Muttaqi” (a name he had not yet taken in 1990) or “Panno” (a name he stopped using publically after 1984), I refer to him by his then-public name, “Sean.”

⁶ A non-exhaustive list of bands who supported MOVE/Abu-Jamal in song, text, or concert includes: Seven Minutes of Nausea, Uptown Bones, Fifth Column, Photon Band, Kingdom Scum, AK-47, Chokehold, Second Thought, Strike Anywhere, BoySetsFire, Ricanstruction, Fifteen, Jonathan Richman, Flobots, Good Riddance, and Atom and His Package. Zines include: *Interbang*, *Contention Builder*, *Slug & Lettuce*, *Live Wild or Die!*, and *Mindless Commodity*.

⁷ For more on *PNS* and the TABC, see Goonan (2018).

⁸ Delbert’s view here regarding anarchists reflected MOVE’s general response to punks, vegans, socialists, or any self-identifying revolutionary: we fight the same system. MOVE people did not engage in commenting on the particulars of straight edge, hardcore, or any specific scene.

⁹ Surprisingly, no Hardliner—including Sean—ever seems to have mentioned Ivan Aguéli: Sufi, anarchist, vegetarian, and radical animal advocate who attempted to assassinate matadors in France on 4 June 1900 (see Sedgwick 2021).

¹⁰ Although Sean has never mentioned obscure punk band ROCKS, their logo of M-16s facing inward appeared in *MRR* in December 1989 prior to the new, very similar Hardline logo in August 1990.

¹¹ The crossed wrenches used by Earth Crisis also more clearly implied whom they literally intended to fight. Crossed clubs (as used by the band Judge) or crossed guns (Circle One, Hardline, etc.) seemed to imply an image of toughness with an unclear target (drug addicts, fellow scenesters, police, military, vivisectioners, doctors, all of the above?). The Earth Crisis wrenches referred more clearly to material actions already taking place against industry for Earth liberation, in the spirit of their 1995 *Destroy the Machines* LP.

¹² In 2021, Naziri largely flipped from his previous wholesale opposition to homosexuality, embraced “FIRST NATION and INDIGENOUS concepts of ... non-binary identities,” and applied exegesis to the Qu’ran, Torah, and Bible arguing that “the literal text does not support ... bigotry and homophobic dogma” (Naziri 2021).

¹³ Also, see Warzone’s retitled version:
<https://warzonedistro.noblogs.org/files/2017/09/The-MOVE-Organization-A-Revolutionary-Struggle-for-Black-Liberation-and-Eco-Defense.pdf> (accessed 29 December 2020).

¹⁴ Also in 2004, the Hardline adjacent zine *xULTRAMILITANCEx* published issue #4 with the tagline: “For Earth, Animal, and Self Liberation.”